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SUBJECT: GHANA POLITICAL ROUNDUP

Topics Covered:

- Ruling NPP Holds Primaries in the North
- Trade Union Leadership Struggle
- Professor Mills Predicts End for NPP
- NPP Poll and Presidential Aspirants
- Ghanaian Concern About Inaction on 2005 Gambia Murders

NPP Selecting Candidates

¶1. (SBU) The ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) is selecting Parliamentary Candidates for constituencies in three northern regions (Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions) ahead of the 2008 general elections. [NOTE: The NPP has been historically weak in these areas, and does not hold parliamentary seats in these constituencies. END NOTE]. In some instances, District Chief Executives and Deputy Regional Ministers are being unanimously selected by party delegates after what the national party officers call "interviews." Some observers have criticized this selection process as neither competitive nor transparent, and have suggested that some candidates who do not receive a nomination may launch independent bids.

¶2. (U) NPP executives have rebutted this criticism, arguing that the screening and endorsement process is an effective and fair method for selecting candidates given the number of activists interested in running. Party officials also claim this approach is appropriate "given the special circumstances facing the party." In the last election, the NPP won only two of 13 seats in the Upper East region, 1 of 10 in the Upper West and 8 of 26 in the Northern region.

ICU in Leadership Struggle

¶3. (U) On August 20, an Accra Court ordered Napoleon Kpoh, Secretary General of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) and Ahmed Y.B. Salifu, National Chairman of the ICU, to step down from office after a 17 year reign. This decision followed a lengthy power struggle between Kpoh and the union's Interim Management Committee, after Kpoh refused to vacate his office at the conclusion of his elected term. Kpoh's term expired on August 10, but Kpoh and Salifu failed to convene a congress of ICU members to choose successors. Kpoh has appealed the court's decision. The ICU remains an influential Trade Union, but this leadership struggle may weaken the union.

End in Sight for the Ruling NPP?

¶4. (U) Professor John Evans Atta Mills, National Democratic Congress (NDC) Presidential Candidate, and former Vice President, claimed August 21 that "the clock is ticking" for the ruling NPP government, saying that the only way the NPP can win in 2008 is to manipulate the election's outcome. Mills, who is currently touring the U. S. to drum up support and money among the Ghanaian diaspora, also said the ruling party is only interested in pursuing a partisan agenda,

instead of keeping Ghana focused on common goals. Mills claims that "Ghanaians are tired of the same old bickering and it is time to move forward." He told his audience that, if elected, his government would enter into dialogue with all shades of political opinion and inspire hope in Ghanaians.

¶5. (U) Mills' trip to the U.S. is but one example of the NDC's vigorous fundraising activities in Europe and North America to support its 2008 campaign. Similar engagements by former President Rawlings across the U.S. are reported to have yielded the NPP USD 700,000 in pledges during August. Mills is one of the better known names in Ghanaian politics, having contested two previous elections. In 2004, he received 43% of the vote compared to Kufuor's 52%. Former FM Announces Candidacy, but trails in NPP POLL

¶6. (SBU) Meanwhile, the contest to represent the NPP in the 2008 elections is becoming more heated, with approximately two-dozen candidates in the current field. On August 28, former Foreign Minister Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo formally announced his candidacy, highlighting his qualifications for the job and arguing that he is the best candidate to "safeguard democracy." On August 29, the President's brother (and former Defense Minister) Addo Kufuor, announced his own candidacy. However, at this stage Addo Kufuor does not appear to be among the front runners.

¶7. (U) Despite much fanfare around Akuffo-Addo's announcement, an Accra-based local newspaper, the Daily Dispatch, published a poll on August 28 of 900 Ghanaians in 15 constituencies, showing former Trade Minister Alan Kyerematen and Vice President Aliu Mahama as the early favorites for the NPP nomination and Akuffo-Addo well behind in third place. Several Embassy sources have cautioned against reading too much into Kyerematen's early lead, saying that much time remains before the election.

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The results follow:

Alan Kyerematen - 16.5%
Alhaji Aliu Mahama - 16%
Hackman Owusu-Agyeman - 10.9%
Nana Akufo-Addo - 10.9%
Dan Botwe -7.6 %
Frimpong Boateng - 6.7 %
Mike Oquaye -6.3 %
Osafo Maafo-5.6 %
Papa Owusu Ankomah -4 %
Addo Kufuor - 2.3 %
Owusu Agyepong -2 %
Kofi Apraku -1.7 %
Jake Obetsebi-Lampitey -1.2 %

Murder of Ghanaians generates new public interest

¶8. (U) Civil society groups and prominent individuals have expressed deep disappointment with the GOG's delay in resolving the murder of eight Ghanaians and forty-four other West African nationals in the Gambia in 2005 while they were en route to Europe through Senegal. Following renewed public interest and media criticism, the MFA announced that a seven-member government delegation departed Accra for the Gambia on August 24 as part of the continuing investigations into this incident.

¶9. (U) Despite numerous delegations to the Gambia, little has been learned about the fate of these individuals. The state owned "Ghanaian Times", quoting Ghana Police sources, recently claimed that the order for the Ghanaians' execution came from Gambian President Yahya Jammeh since he was led to believe that the Ghanaians in question were dissidents preparing to overthrow his regime. President Jammeh did not attend the recent African Union summit in Accra and some Ghanaian observers attributed his absence to the controversy over the Ghanaian deaths. A final report on the incident should be issued in September, according to government sources.

